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ABSTRACT

The Library Policy Committee appointed by the Finland Ministry of Education in 1999 worked for 2 years to identify the challenges arising in the civil information society and the concrete solutions to them. This document is a summary of the salient points of the Committee's report. First, the vision for the Finnish public library is outlined, including objectives for libraries at the local, regional, and national levels. A discussion of the decline in library funding and library resources, growth in library use, and new costs emerging in the information society is followed by the Committee's proposals. Committee proposals for these areas are offered: quality information retrieval at libraries; more benefit from information and communication technologies; new forms of library cooperation; and learners' access to information and school libraries. The Committee's cost estimates for library development are highlighted, and justifications for increased library funding are offered. Discussion then moves to what will happen if nothing is done in the library field and the added value of the library in use of information networks. Finally, the library as a basic right in the information society and citizenship in the information society are addressed. (AEF)

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A WIDE RANGE OF CULTURE AND QUALITY INFORMATION RETRIEVAL IN THE LIBRARY

The salient points and proposals in the Finnish Library Policy Programme 2001-2004. Committee's report.

The Library Policy Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1999 worked for two years to identify the challenges arising in the civil information society and seek concrete solutions to them. This document is a summary of the salient points of the Committee's report.

Ministry of Education 2001

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1

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QUO VADIS, LIBRARY?

In the public library of the information era, physical and virtual services support and strengthen each other. The absolute minimum services at a public library are
- up-to-date cultural and information material in several different formats, organised for easy access;
- professional staff;
- a computerised library system which meets recommended standards, and net connections;
- services accessible on the net, and
- terminals linked to the Internet for the use of customers.

The library's traditional cultural and enlightening mission will not disappear, but will merge with the modern information and advisory services. The municipal library is a local cultural centre, a quality portal which makes the accumulated cultural and intellectual capital available to people, who can use it according to need, either in the library or on the net. The materials are increasingly available in several formats. Both information retrieval services and the relevant equipment must be able to respond to new needs.

One aim for the Committee was to devise a model for the division of work between libraries at the national, regional and local levels. This would allow each level to concentrate on activities best suited to it. Networking benefits all libraries.

The library at the local level, in a municipality, a residential area or a village
- Offers a living room for the community,
- Provides a highway to culture and the information universe,
- Offers information about content,
- Provides an information service, access to information,
- Guides users in independent information retrieval,
- Processes local information,
- Makes basic citizenship knowledge available,
- Networks with local public services,
- Networks with local private services,
- Serves local business and industry,
- Offers a forum for civic activity, for voluntary networking,
- Houses the virtual local community, and
- Organises cultural events and services.

The library at the regional level
- Processes and manages regional information together with regional partners (e.g. by jointly producing metadata on regional information, knowledge and culture with museums and archives),
- Provides flexible and efficient interlibrary services, whatever the medium, and
- Networks with regional cultural services.

The library at the national level
- Provides information services for the citizen and disseminates nationally produced information,
- Constitutes an electronic library,
- Maintains national data banks and ensures the joint use of libraries' databanks,
- Produces metadata, or centralised catalogues with content descriptions,
- Provides flexible and efficient interlibrary services, whatever the medium,
- Issues national licences, and
- Provides software services.

The library field also has an international dimension:
- Global knowledge resources and processes, and access to globally produced metadata,
- Information management within the European Union, right and access to knowledge, and
- Virtual access for interest groups abroad (e.g. expatriate Finns in Sweden, Australia and the United States doing genealogical research on their Finnish roots).

THE VISION

In Finnish society, the public library is an active and effective institution, easily accessible and easy for people to visit.
- It is open to all and strengthens democracy.
- It passes on cultural heritage and supports multiculturalism.
- It builds and promotes the community spirit.
- It adds value to collections of documents by selecting and organising different materials.
- It is a learning environment, supporting learners of all ages.
- It promotes comprehensive literacy – including media literacy.
- It is a good work community of competent professionals.
- It networks with partners, making their collections and services available locally.
- Its collections and services are accessible through networks (digital library).
- It is a desirable partner and contributes to the success and welfare of the region.

SECURING BASIC CONDITIONS

The information society is everyday reality at the library s service and in remote access statistics. Finns have voted with their feet and keyboards for the library as a basic information society service. Library visits and lending rates kept growing all through the 1990s, when also tele-use emerged. Nonetheless, library resources have been falling to the tune of a 10% decline in the real value of operational appropriations over the nineties.

Per capita	1991	1999	Change N	+/- %
Book acquisitions	0.41	0.3	-0.11	-27
Material acquisitions				
Total	0.46	0.36	-0.1	-22
Lending	17.9	19.3	1.4	8
Visits	10.7	12.4	1.7	16
Book acquisition FIM	35	26	-9	-26
- In 1999 monetary value*	40	26	-14	-35
Library material acquisition costs				
Total	49	40	-9	-18
- In 1999 monetary value*	56	40	-16	-29
Operational expenses FIM	229	233.9	5	2
- In 1999 monetary value*	261	233.9	-27	-10
Per 1000 inhabitants				
Person years	0.93	0.81	-0.12	-13
Book acquisitions	413	303	-110	-27
Other material acquisitions	46	60	14	30
Total library material acquisitions	459	364	-95	-21
Newspapers and periodicals (annual vols)	22	19	-3	-12

The factor for converting 1991 monetary value to 1999 is 1.14 (Statistics Finland)
Source: Local services and economy statistics. Ministry of Education

1 Euro = 5.9 FIM

3

The greatest problem is the inadequate library funding at the local level. In 1991 local authorities spent 1.3% of their total expenditure on libraries and 1.1% in 1998, whereas in 1999 the figure had plummeted to 0.8%, although the construction of the information society was in full speed.

This means that libraries have had to cope with growing library use with declining resources. All the while, libraries have been building the necessary technical infrastructure and net connections, putting material on the net, buying hardware for the use of both their clientele and personnel, and training personnel in the use of software and databases. Even with all the rationalisation involved in computerisation, libraries have had to finance this progress at the cost of traditional materials (books, periodicals) and by downsizing the library network and reducing staff and lowering competence requirements.

Since some 75% of the Finnish municipalities are small (population under 10,000), it is a challenge to offer equitable services to everyone everywhere in Finland. The situation is getting worse, especially in smaller libraries, which do not always have the resources to offer modern library services. In some cases, this can be directly attributed to the local authority's deliberate choice not to make adequate input into library services.

In Finland, public libraries have a responsibility assigned to them by Parliament for satisfying citizens' need for information, knowledge and culture. In view of this, their core funding should be raised to an appropriate level both in the national budget and in local budgets. This entails that funding is seen in the context of the information society and that the library network and technical infrastructure are effective.

The downswing in resources must be rectified in response to the extensive, and growing, library use and to this end, it is necessary :
- To fill in the gaps in the acquisition of printed materials,
- To reverse personnel cuts,
- To cover the new expenses due to technical advances: ICT hardware and software, new material formats, and multiplied material production.

New costs emerging in the information society:
- New generation computer systems which meet recommended standards,
- Fees charged for the use of electronic materials,
- Personnel increases and in-service training in response to the demands of the information society (ICT, new teaching methods, lifelong learning, growing need for guidance) and salaries competitive with other information professions, and
- Access to virtual library services for all public libraries.

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The current system of statutory state aid gives no incentive for developing library services or the national library network. Since the present calculation method is based on unit costs, a minimum standard of services should be defined either in the Library Act or in national standards for the cost-effectiveness of library services to be measured accurately. However, the Committee decided to endorse the use of quality and standard recommendations.

Future developments will entail a holistic approach based on citizens' information needs. This, in the opinion of the Committee, requires a stronger central administration in library affairs, more input into cross-sectoral projects, funding for services intended for libraries' joint use, and a national, cross-sectoral programme for developing libraries (including research and other scientific libraries). The Committee recommends that local authorities and regional partners devise regional information management strategies.

Information produced within the public administration is of special relevance to citizens. The Committee sees that one of libraries' core tasks is to make public information available to all. This entails defining the concept of 'basic information' and determining the terms on which libraries can make it available to users.

The Committee's proposals

- The statutory state aid system will be developed to support the creation of an effective and efficient library network, which will ensure better basic information services for citizens in smaller and larger municipalities. The rationale behind the proposal concerning funding is that the mission of libraries is comparable to educational establishments and libraries thus share responsibility for education and that public library services transcend municipal boundaries.
- Other proposals aim at making regional cooperation attractive and at promoting the production of services for the joint use of all public libraries.
- The criterion for discretionary state subsidies should be not only local input, but also compliance with the recommended standards to be created and the existence of a local or regional library and information strategy.
- The services of the National Library should be extended to public libraries.
- The deficiencies in national and local library funding should be put right, and measures should be taken to find additional funding to cover the cost of the information management services needed as a result of technological advances, the media revolution and growing library use.
- Local authorities and regions should devise a library and information strategy and evaluate its implementation using the recommended standards.
- Local authorities should contribute to the financing of libraries with a sum corresponding to 1.5-2% of their current expenditure.
- A library and information management unit should be established in central administration. It should have sufficient personnel resources commensurate with the demands of the information society and new tasks. Care should be taken to ensure that there are enough professional who know the overall situation in library and information services and current trends in the field.
- Measures should be taken to determine the terms on which public information can be made available to citizens through libraries.

QUALITY INFORMATION RETRIEVAL AT LIBRARIES

Library professionals contribute to the chain of material production and transfer is above all by facilitating information retrieval. The library has been fine-tuned to respond to individual information needs and questions. It specialises in recording books, articles, videos, music, electronic publications in a way which ensures that users can find the piece of information, text, music, film etc. they need. To this end, the library classifies, indexes and catalogues materials, i.e. describes the content and records publication data. The personnel's knowledge of information sources is cumulative competence, growing with each professional task.

The exponentially growing material production and new publication formats entails screening and recommendations regarding information sources. Quality means that the client gets 5 to 10 relevant references instead of 200 haphazard ones.

For instance the added value of personalised information services derives from interaction and the possibility to verify and specify the need. Face-to-face encounters with the client make the most of the accumulating expertise of the library worker. Optimally, the information seeker learns retrieval skills and becomes familiar with information sources in the process.

The Committee stresses that providing quality services requires more resources than libraries currently have: more knowledgeable professionals are needed to analyse the growing flows of information. Access to library professionals is threatened by the impending wave of retirement and the low salaries. One third of library professionals will retire within ten years. Contending with stringency measures, public libraries have hired few workers during the nineties. Many of the library and information field graduates find better-paid jobs in the private sector, where their information management skills are appreciated.

Processing information and guiding an increasingly educated clientele require that more and more library workers need university or polytechnic degrees, but the relative number of graduates has decreased. The impending wave of retirement concerns the managerial and expert level in particular.

The Committee proposes that

- The number, competencies and salaries of library personnel be raised to meet current demands and
- Libraries devise staff-development programmes.

MORE BENEFIT FROM ICT

Information and communications technologies offer great opportunities for upgrading library services, and thereby access to information, knowledge and culture. This will not, however, happen as a matter of course. Finnish libraries have advanced rapidly since the mid 1990s, having made felicitous strategy choices: from the outset, they began developing net services geared to all the libraries in the country. Government support has been available to smaller municipalities for library networking, centralised service production and coordination since 1996. A joint development project, open to all libraries, was set up for the purpose of developing Internet services.

This voluntary development, mainly based on the enthusiasm of the profession, has now run its course. The government should finance the production of services which benefit all libraries. In particular, the Linnea databases and Kirjastot.fi (www.publiclibraries.fi) services should be financed directly from the state budget. Efficient knowledge transfer requires that more rigorous conditions are determined for library cooperation.

The Library Policy Committee identified the following prerequisites for the full use ICT in all libraries, whatever their size:

- Common standards must be determined for the computerised systems of libraries and school libraries.
- Libraries should be encouraged to use at least the minimum standards needed to ensure information transfer; this is particularly important in the case of smaller libraries, because they benefit most from the pooling of information (e.g. centrally produced services such as cataloguing, and book purchases, etc.).
- Information or services produced in the electronic format should not be duplicated but made available to others, who could then adapt them to their own needs.

The Committee proposes that

- The technical infrastructure be overhauled so that each municipality has a standardised library system which meets the demands of modern library services;
- Recommended standards be issued without delay for public libraries and school libraries. Vocational institutions and polytechnics in a region should take the common standards into consideration in order to ensure the exchange of information and transactions;
- The use of the recommended standards be made a condition for discretionary state subsidies; and
- A sufficient number of terminals be acquired for the use of clients (recommendation 1/1000 inhabitants).

NEW FORMS OF COOPERATION

Finnish libraries have been reorganising their networks since the mid 1980s, when libraries began pooling resources regionally in the acquisition of computerised systems and materials. These have generated other forms of cooperation. Public libraries have joint projects with each other and with other types of libraries in the region (e.g. polytechnic and/or university libraries), and they cooperate with regional councils in EU projects.

In the Committee's understanding, this kind of regional cooperation will continue to develop and expand. Networking means a new division of work between libraries; for instance, different kinds of catalogue information are made available to all the libraries on the net. Especially smaller libraries should avail themselves of the material and services produced elsewhere and thereby free their resources for serving their clienteles.

In some regions, the preferences of the clientele have necessitated library cooperation. People use the best-equipped library in the region, even if it is in another municipality. Where such cross-border use of libraries is frequent and causes disagreement, the municipalities concerned should negotiate and agree on procedures and respective financial responsibilities.

Libraries may have to deal with new partners. Material producers disseminate more detailed information about their products, frequently including metadata, which is then distributed through different media. Cataloguing is no longer the prerogative of libraries.

For the information on the net to be accessible, the cataloguing and other descriptions need to be of a high quality. This requires common quality criteria for cataloguing, whether done by libraries, publishing houses or other knowledge producers. Libraries are responsible for quality control, coordination and the compilation of metadata for the use of clients. The libraries, forming a sufficiently large and structured national and international institution, is able to make metadata systematically available to the public. It is the only institution capable of producing catalogues covering all material formats.

As new forms of action, the Committee proposes information management clusters between public and private sector partners and information society contracts between those who produce knowledge and those who distribute it.

The Committee proposes that

- Regional measures be taken to improve library services for the residents of small and medium-sized municipalities and to support centralised and decentralised production of services for common use;
- Staff development training and peer support be intensified to enable libraries in small and medium-sized municipalities to serve their clienteles;
- Municipalities in a region agree on forms of cooperation and financial responsibilities in cases where the local population clearly favour a better- equipped library in one of the municipalities;
- Measures be taken to clarify the library's role in the analysis and dissemination of educational contents and in the chain of information production and transfer; and
- A study be undertaken to explore the possibilities of creating information management clusters, especially with a view to financing network production and projects.

THE LEARNER'S ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES

There are very few professionally managed school libraries in Finland. Pupils and some students use public libraries, because only polytechnics and universities have libraries and provide information services. About 40% of municipal public libraries are located in a school building or in its immediate vicinity. Four out of five mobile libraries stop at schools. The cutbacks in mobile libraries and library resources have hit primary and secondary students particularly hard. Their access to information should be seen as part of the existing library network at both the local and national level.

The Committee proposes that

- A national strategy for information management serving learners be devised and incorporated into the national development programme for library and information services and that cost calculations be made for several alternative solutions; and
- The preconditions for school libraries be determined: the person responsible for the library should have library training, should update materials in response to pupils' and teachers' needs, maintain Internet connections and use the joint services provided on the library and information management network.

WHAT WOULD A RESPONSE TO THE NEW CHALLENGES COST IN FINLAND?

Public input into national information management is indispensable in a knowledge-based society for two reasons: a desire to cherish the diversity which contributes to the intellectual capital in the country and a desire to secure citizen's access to information, knowledge and culture. Diversity and democracy are the pillars of modern information society. New intellectual capital does not accrue unless citizens, artists, entrepreneurs etc. can make the widest possible use of the cultural heritage.

The Committee made a preliminary and indicative estimate of the costs involved. The figures mainly cover measures for rectifying the current backwardness in resource allocation and the implementation of the quality standards proposed in the programme.

	million Euro
Material	12.3
Personnel	26.7
Computers	9
Salary adjustment (incl. abolished and recommended posts)	46.7
Total	94.7

The measures listed would cost around 18.3 Euro per capita in a year. The increases would mean a rise of 46% in the unit cost used in statutory state aid. Nearly 40% of the additional funds would be provided by municipalities and 60% by the government.

In 1999 the operational expenditure in libraries came up to 201 million Euro. The total number of person years (FTE) was 4,156, in addition to which there were 613 persons hired on employment subsidies. The Committee also discussed the possibility of a library fee, but no new arguments for it came up.

New expenditure is difficult to calculate reliably because of the great variety of factors influencing matters. For instance, estimating the cost of library system standardisation would require a separate study. The computerised systems cost 13,350 Euro per library on average. Setting up and updating a system requires an investment of 50,000 Euro on average. There are great differences in costs, notably depending on the size of the municipality. The total cost of computerised library systems in Finland was nearly 16.7 million Euro. The annual maintenance costs come up to some 5.6 million Euro.

Another large cost in sight is fees charged for the use of electronic materials, which is very difficult to estimate at this point. The domestic markets of the greatest relevance to public libraries are only taking form at the moment, Finland being a minor language spoken by ca. five million people. More detailed studies would also be needed to find out the cost of services produced for the use of all libraries, as well as the cost of putting public information available in libraries.

The Committee presents the following justifications for increased library funding:

Material acquisitions should be raised to the recommended level of 400 books/year/1,000 inhabitants (currently 300 books/year/1,000 inhabitants). The recommendation for material other than books is 100 items /year/1,000 inhabitants (currently 600 items/year/1,000 inhabitants).

The recommended personnel is one person year (FTE)/1,000 inhabitants. This and the "return" of the discontinued posts would together mean some 1,000 additional person years.

The adjustment of librarians' salaries is based on the mean salary paid to comprehensive school teachers, even though it would be more realistic to compare library salaries with those paid in the ICT field.

The national recommendation of one Internet terminal per 1,000 inhabitants would mean 3,600 new terminals. The estimate of • 9 million covers the cost of telecommunications, personnel, the service infrastructure and basic software. At present some 30% of Finnish municipalities provide Internet services in the recommended extent.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF NOTHING IS DONE IN THE LIBRARY FIELD?

Democracy

In some municipalities the present input is so low, that they cannot even offer adequate traditional library services. If nothing is done, the library system as we know it will disappear. The library and information services needed in a knowledge-based society would be available only in half of the Finnish municipalities. This would mean a redefinition of the public library system: the aim of securing equal access to information, knowledge and culture everywhere in the country would have to abandoned. This would put an end to the great tradition of equitable library services.

The economy

The intellectual and cultural capital, the collections and all the expertise amassed in libraries over the years would be left unused or under-used. The international success of the Finnish information society is based on access to information and cultural resources accumulated over the decades, which the school and the library pass on. As institutions open to all Finns, the public library contributes to the critical mass of well-educated citizens able to look for the essential in the info glut. This nation has not only created new ICT and content products, but also use them to an extent which makes Finland a virtual information society laboratory. If we give up this competitive edge, it will seriously undermine the intellectual foundation on which innovation rests.

Other drawbacks

- If library collections are outdated or there are no knowledgeable persons to help with information retrieval, local residents will not get information about new developments.
- There will be overlapping and doubling. Smaller municipalities cannot make full use of centrally produced services if their computer systems are not up to standard.
- Library and information services and library use will concentrate into the major libraries in each region. Residents will have to travel long distances to the well-equipped libraries.
- Inadequate knowledge will lead to wrong decisions or unproductive investments. To take an example: if local authorities do not know what requirements computerised systems should fulfil, they have to pay dearly for the experience.
- The funds allocated by government to municipalities will not be used for the purpose intended.
- The problem of school libraries will not be solved in a functional and cost-effective way.
- Vacancies cannot be filled, which would undermine people's access to information and the quality of information management.

ADDED VALUE OF THE LIBRARY IN THE USE OF INFORMATION NETWORKS

The traditional role of the library will be fundamentally the same in network services, but new kinds of materials - constantly changing, moving and disappearing - require new applications of the basic professional skills. Network services supplement physical facilities and collections but do not replace them.

- Information retrieval skills and knowledge of information sources are expanding to include electronic materials. Libraries analyse, classify and describe information for use in retrieval systems and thereby help their clients to find what they are looking for. On the net, libraries answer clients' questions about information, offer access to library collections and information retrieval tools, and instruct users in information retrieval.
- In the new digital environment, the library still disseminates intellectual and cultural contents. Libraries are expected to evaluate and value information available on the net in the same way as they review and select literature.
- Information management relating to the net can be summarised as "less is more". Experts choose a few net sites and/or portals relevant to the client's request among hundreds of options. Selection is even more important with regard to electronic materials than printed materials. It takes skill to glean relevant information among all non-information, to assess knowledge and its reliability, and so on.
- Libraries have a great deal of expertise, silent knowledge and know-how which can be put to full use with the help of the new tools available. For instance, book lists relating to certain themes compiled in one library can be made available to all on the www.kirjastot.fi site (cf. www.publiclibraries.fi).
- The library has a general view of information sources, information transfer systems and information services. Library professionals are able to appraise whether given Internet sites have value as information sources or whether it is better to look for the answer in traditional printed sources, or both.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to information means the ability to cope with the constantly growing mass of information. Measures must be taken to glean knowledge in the immense info glut. Access to information is facilitated by the public library,

- which provides selected and organised cultural resources and up-to-date information and knowledge in different formats;
- whose staff have an overall picture of the information and knowledge available, sources of information, communications systems and information services;
- are able to evaluate the validity and reliability of information sources and screen out non-information;
- whose staff are able to instruct individuals in information management; and
- whose staff help individuals find the essential in a mass of data and information and use it.

In Finland, the public library has a duty, assigned by Parliament, to manage information for citizens and to ensure access to culture, metadata and public information in the knowledge-based society.

LIBRARY IS A BASIC RIGHT IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

The right to information and creativity is a basic human right in the information society. The right to information is also intrinsic to full citizenship; without it, there is no democracy. Thirdly, the right to information is indispensable to creativity. Thus it is self-fulfilment and self-expression, on the one hand, and participation in the production of meanings and realisation of common intellectual potential, on the other. The right to information entails information management, accessibility of information for citizens, and access to metadata and information.

It is a special characteristic of intellectual capital, knowledge and culture that they accrue. To be able to create, artists, researchers, cultural entrepreneurs and increasingly also ordinary citizens must be familiar with culture and heritage. Access to sources of culture and knowledge is thus a prerequisite in a knowledge-based society.

The basic values in the information society are:
- Right to knowledge and teh ability to use it
- Right to citizenship and citizenship skills
- Right to and skills of self-expression and creativity

Citizenship in the information society

10

A full-fledged citizen of the information society must have right and access to information and the ability to find and produce knowledge. New technological applications entail new kinds of citizenship skills. Minimum access to information means that each citizen gets information about existing knowledge (metadata).

Preconditions for citizenship in the information society
- Information society infrastructure
- Basic information society rights
- Information society citizenship skills

The information society requires a sufficiently rapid technical infrastructure, which in turn entails an information service network accessible to all, i.e. libraries. Civil information society also provides a social infrastructure: tele-democracy forums for civic activity and citizens' interactive participation in decision-making.

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Information society infrastructure
- Technical infrastructure
- Information service network
- Social infrastructure
- Interactive services

The basic information society rights are a concrete manifestation of the fundamental values of right to information, access to knowledge, privacy and data protection (e.g. as consumers) and of the individual's right to create meanings and produce knowledge. Data reserves, such as library and archival collections, and innovation constitute a valuable part of human capital.

Basic information society rights
- Right to information
- Access to information and knowledge
- Information society citizenship
- Data protection
- Immaterial property rights, copyright

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In order to succeed in the information society and to use his/her own creative capacity, the individual needs more and more competencies and comprehension skills. The basic values and equal citizenship will not be realised if people do not have these skills.

Information society citizenship skills
- Traditional literacy
- Computer literacy
- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Information retrieval skills
- Information acquisition skills
- Skills in creating cultural meanings
- Information production skills

The growing use of information networks and the accelerating rate of knowledge accumulation requires skills in information management and retrieval, which are the traditional core competence of the library.

- The library institution constitutes a comprehensive educational, cultural and technical information service infrastructure. Its provision realises the basic rights, provides information, knowledge and culture, and teaches citizenship skill needed in the information society. The public library takes care of information management and the availability of public information, knowledge and culture in the information society.
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The Library Policy Programme 2001 - 2004.
Detailed proposals in Finnish at http://www.minedu.fi/opm/kulttuuri/yleiset_kirjastot.html

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